

Richard Dutton, 15 Cherry St.

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Dec. 8th -

Richard Dutton

admitted March 15th 1820

Edmund

Richard P. Butler

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Albany

On Tetanus from Wounds.

Tetanic complaints have been divided into two kinds - Idiopathic and Symptomatic, the latter is by far the most common in our climate, and has the higher claims to our consideration. The different species, which Nosologists have distinguished, viz: *obichotonos*, *Emprosthotonos*, &c. being but one, and the same disease, in different grades of violence or situations, I shall not notice. Such systematic refinements having, I believe, become almost obsolete.

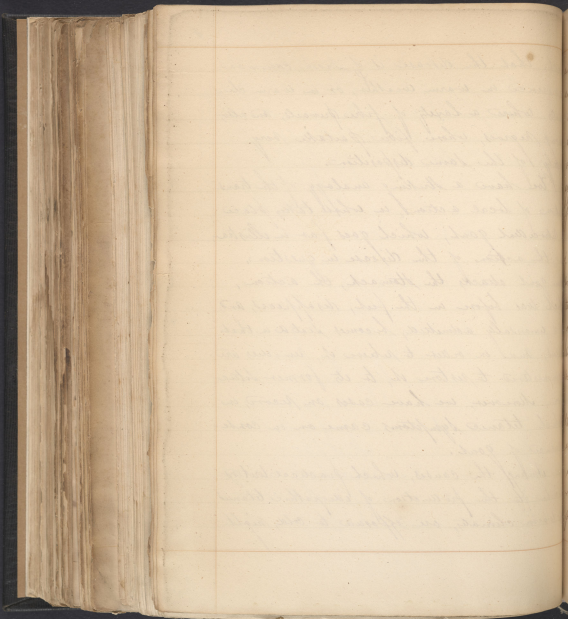
Wounds, on any part of the body, may produce Tetanus, but the most liable, are those of the scalp, the hands or the feet: they may be either incised, contused, lacerated or punctured; but more frequently the latter,

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The symptoms may appear at an indefinite length of time from the reception of the injury, until the wound has entirely healed. If the wound has proceeded to inflammation, suppuration or granulation, the first warning that the patient has of his approaching danger, is the unhealthy aspect of his sore. If it was inflamed and painful, the pain and inflammation seems to have subsided, without any evident cause; if suppuration had supervened, instead of a laudable pus, there is frequently a discharge of a thin white appearance; if granulations have arisen, they appear soft, and of a pallid hue. About this time, there is an indescribable uneasiness of the system generally; with lethargy and indisposition to exercise; soon after, a sense of rigidity arises in the back part of the neck, with pain, extending downwards. As the rigidity increases, deglutition becomes difficult, affects

with uneasiness about the root of the tongue.

Whilst this is going on, a violent pain frequently commences at the scrobiculus cordis, of a nature not easily described; which sometimes extends into the back, attended with rigidity of the muscles of the thorax. At this time the lower jaw becomes obstinately fixed; and the muscles of the face, assume what has been denominated the cynic smile. Now also, if the disease is going to be violent, the muscles of the back become affected with spasmodic rigidity, drawing the head forcibly backwards; sometimes the spasms extend down the lower extremities, and the patient, when lying on his back, is thrown upwards, forming a curve, resting only on his head and heels. The disease may now be said to have fully formed; the spasms recur every two or three minutes, especially, if there be any noise or disturbance about the patient; or, frequently if only liquor, be offered; in this respect, resembling



Hydrophobia. The pulse, in the commencement, is frequently full and strong; but, as the disease advances, it generally diminished, or assumes an action lower than that of nature. The bowels are universally slow. There is often a febrile appearance of the tongue.

The disease continuing, sometimes the spasms of the muscles of the lower jaw, and those of the thorax, seem to be diminished in energy, or go entirely off; whilst those of the back, and neck become more violent, or, others, which were before not affected, take on the spasmodic action; as those of the abdomen and larynx. Suffocation arises, with great anxiety and distress, and thus, or with the universal convulsions, the wretched sufferer finds relief in the arms of death.

Seeing that all those effects are produced, in consequence of a wound received, we are naturally led to inquire into the proximity

cause, or, what is the same thing, the disease itself. From analogy to other diseased actions, let us seek for a theory, that will account for the astonishing change wrought upon our patient in the course of a few hours; and, from which may be deduced, a practice best adapted to the removal of his complaint.

Prior to the attack, we shall find the inflammatory symptoms subside, and sensibility in the part greatly diminished; and, I presume, in the exact ratio, that the muscles elsewhere are affected. Hence, may we not infer, that, this action in the part originally injured, and which we call inflammatory, instead of being confined and located where it ought to be, is thrown off upon the muscles, giving to them an increased excitement, which produces the spasmodic action, characteristic of the complaint.

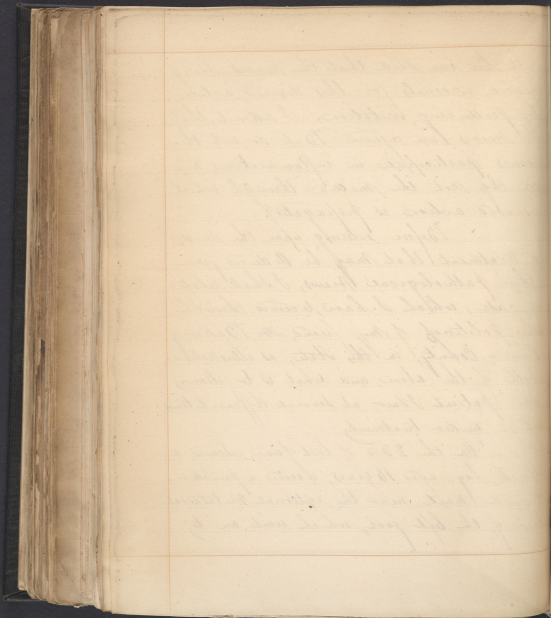
That the muscles are predisposed to take on this diseased action, I infer from the

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fact, that the disease is of more common occurrence in warm weather, or in warm climates, where a laxity of fibres prevails; and also, among negroes, whose fibres partake very largely of the same disposition.

We have a striking analogy of the translation of local actions, in what takes place in subcutaneous gout, which goes far in illustrating the action of the disease in question. When gout attacks the stomach, the action, which was before in the feet, disappears, and, as is universally admitted, becomes seated in that viscus, and in order to relieve it, remedies are administered to restore it, to its former situation. Moreover, we have cases on record, in which tetanic symptoms came on in consequence of gout.

Among the causes, which practical writers ascribe to the production of idiopathic tetanus in warm climates, are exposure to cold, night

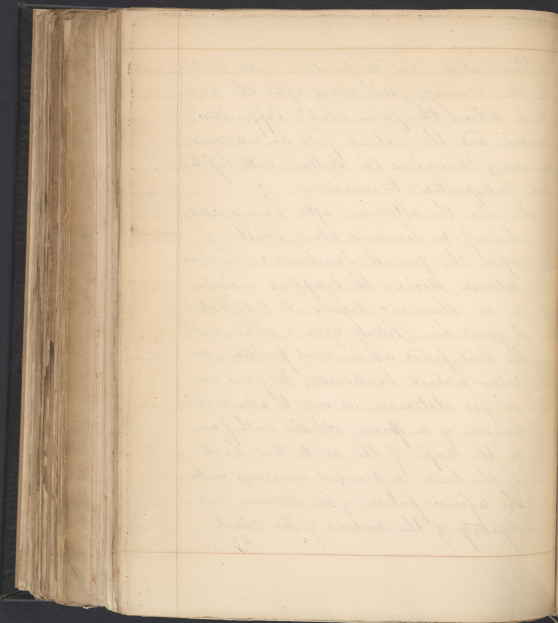


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air and moisture, obstructed perspiration, &c. These are among the causes, which in our climate induce acute rheumatism. The action here is modified by peculiarity of constitution and other circumstances; yet we often find it approaching tetanus, in the slight affection, familiarly denominated a stiff neck.

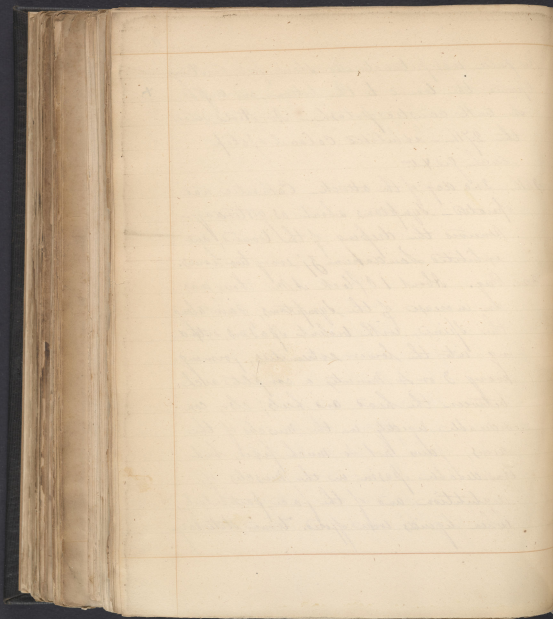
Baron Storch, of Vienna, relates the case of a patient labouring under Rheumatism, in whom there was universal stiffness soon to tetanus." And, Dr. Stoll describes a case of episthotonos from gout. In these instances, we find the transition of morbid action meeting, exactly, at the point of tetanus.

Another proof, of the correctness of this theory, is, that in preventing the disease, we endeavour, by general and local means, to invigorate the system, and continue inflammation, in the wounded part. Thus we prevent the muscles from taking an excessive



excitement. — But, when the morbid action becomes fixed in the muscles, it produces derangement in every function, that is ready to sympathize with them: the bowels become constipated; the pulse more or less accelerated, indicating a loss of excitement, which becomes morbidly accumulated in the muscles.

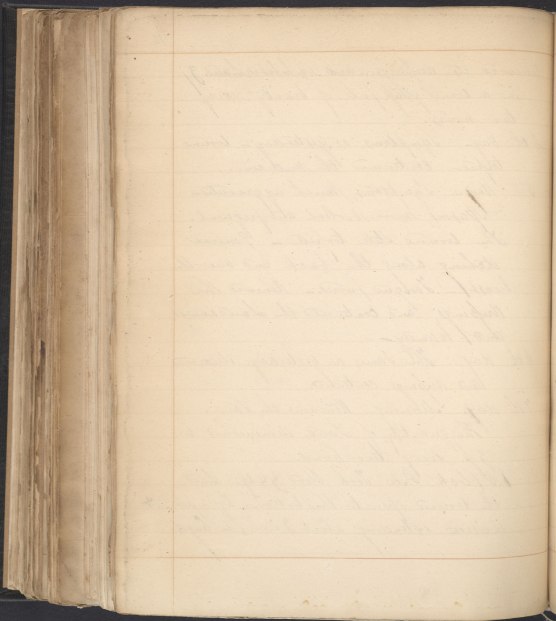
It may be objected to these views, that the inflammation in a wound, so slight as that made by a needle, would not be sufficient to produce all these constitutional effects; but do we not often find a hectic fever, which threatens dissolution, excited and kept up by a perforating abscess? This proves that the system is susceptible of taking on a high grade of disease, from very slight causes, and, which would seem to be disproportionate to the exciting cause.



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It has been said, that the nerves being injured, accounts for this diseased action, by producing irritations. I admit, that the nerves are injured. But do not the nerves participate in inflammation, and are they not the media through which diseased action is propagated?

Before entering upon the mode of treatment that may be deduced from these pathological views, I shall relate a case, which I have received through the politeness of my friend, Gen. Baker, of Chester County, in this State, as illustrations both of the above, and what is to follow. The patient I saw, at several different times, whilst under treatment.

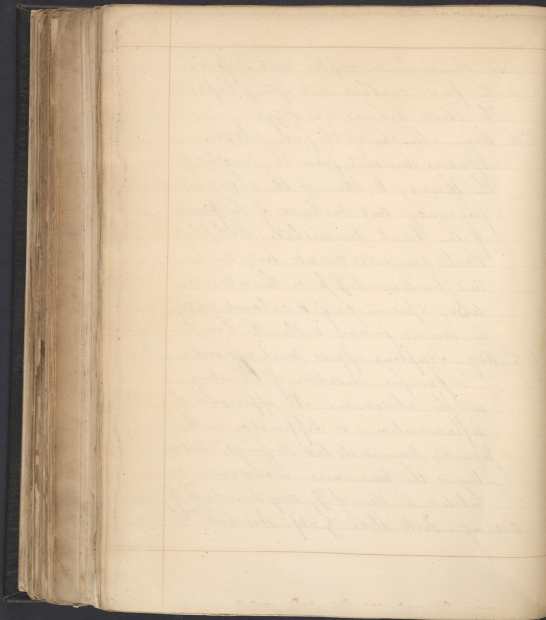
"On the 23rd of last June, Lewis, a black boy, aged 16 years, received a puncture from a nail, near the external metatarsal bone of the left foot, which went on to



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inflammation and suppuration until the 28th in the evening, five days after the accident, when the pain abated, suppuration ceased, and the patient felt an indescribable uneasiness throughout the system, with lappitude and indisposition to exercise.

29th. In the afternoon, after having indulged himself in lounging about, sometimes upon the ground, sometimes on the floor, between doors; - the symptoms increased to an alarming degree. At 8 o'clock, I found him sitting upon a chair, with his head fixed in an erect position, or rather inclined backwards. His jaws were so far stationary, as only to admit the handle of a spoon; attended with pain in the nape of the neck and back of the head; a peculiar uneasiness under the inferior portion of the sternum, and rigidity of the muscles of the chest,



11
His pulse was preternaturally slow, full and strong.
Opened the wound to the bottom, and dressed it with caustic potash. - No stools since the 27th - exhibited Calomel & oleum each gr. 40. *

30th. 2nd day of the attack - Cathartics had operated - symptoms about as yesterday - renewed the dressing of the wound, and exhibited *Sauvignacum* ʒi every two hours.

3rd day. About 10 o'clock A.M. there was an increase of the symptoms; pain along the spine, with violent spasms, extending into the lower extremities, forming every 3 or 4 minutes a complete arch between the head and heels; also, considerable rigidity in the muscles of the arms; jaws not so much fixed, but considerable spasm in the muscles of deglutition and of the face, particularly, when liquids were offered. Wound stationary.

renewed its dressings, and exhibited *Saud. 3j*
in a wine glass full of brandy every
two hours.

4th Day - Symptoms, as yesterday - wound
torpid - continued the medicine.

5th Day - Symptoms, much aggravated -
spasms, more violent and frequent.

The wound still torpid - General
itching along the back and over the
breast. - Tongue furred. - Renewed the
dressings, and continued the *Saudanum*
and brandy. -

6th Day - The same as yesterday - *Saudanum*
and dressings continued.

7th day - Morning - Remains the same.

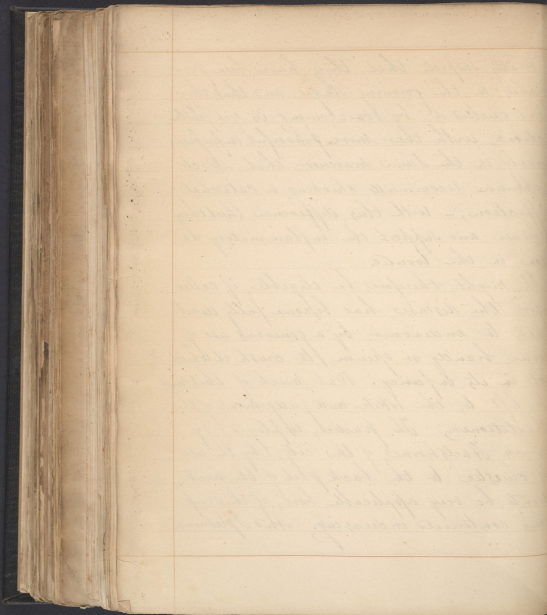
The quantity of *Saud.* diminished to
3℥ every two hours.

8 O'clock P.M. Took Blood 34℥. Laid
the wound open to the bottom, by a free +
incision extending about 3 inches in length

and one inch in depth, and dressed it
with pulv. canthar and Spts. of turpentine.
The blood drawn was 5ij.

8th. day. Muscles of the face relaxed.
Spasms removed, from the muscles of
the thorax, to those of the abdomen -
frequency and violence of the spasms
of the back diminished. Exhibited
Carb. Ammonia gr. x. every two hours,
and Laudanum ʒss in the intervals;
also, Opium gr. ij & Calomel. grs. viij,
in divided portions, within 12 hours.

9th. day. Symptoms appear much aggravated,
a painful sensation of thrusting,
in the abdomen. No appearance of
inflammation or suppuration in the
wound; renewed its last dressings. Discon-
tinued the Ammonia. Laudanum ex-
hibited in dose of ʒj every hour to help.
Evening. Took blood ʒ ʒvj. No, had too



number of stools through the course
of the day.

10th. Day - Abdomen nearly clear of spasm,
none along the back and the face
quite tranquil. But the muscles of the
throat and chest appear much affected.
Complains of suffocating. Bled him 34x. x
He became quite easy before the blood
was stopped, and fell into a slumber.
Wound still dry - no appearance of
suppuration.

11th. Day - Morning - Spasms of the chest
and throat returned with increased
violence, and closing in upon their
victim, bared admission to the
'breath of life.'

From this interesting case, we learn, that,
after the disease had become fully established,
Laudanum, and other stimulants, being prescribed,
had no good effect whatever; but on the
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I received your letter of the 10th inst. and was
glad to hear from you. I am well and hope
this finds you the same. I have not much news
to write at present. I am still in the same
situation and hope to remain so for some
time.

I am very much interested in the
progress of the cause and hope to see
it soon triumph. I have been thinking
much of late of the great efforts that
are being made in various parts of the
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contrary, seemed rather to aggravate the symptoms. But, when bloodletting and other evacuating remedies were employed, the symptoms were much alleviated. As the foregoing pathological views would presume, these acted, particularly the bleeding, by equalizing excitement.

I do write, therefore, from the views I entertain of the nature of this complaint, and, from what I have seen of it, if called in after the incipient stage has passed, make a bold and free use of the lancet, as recommended by Doct. Doxey in his lectures; and "kick the patient on the verge of the grave." This is a desperate practice, it is true, but we must bear in mind, that, we have a desperate disease to contend with.

Wine, opium and other diffusible stimulants have been recommended, and sometimes have proved successful. But, whenever their administration has been attended with success,

I greatly suspect, that, they have been prescribed in the forming stage, and thus, they have quelled it, by overcoming its vit. felle actions, with their more powerful impressions nearly in the same manner, that Doct. Chapman recommends checking a catarrhal affections; - with this difference, that, they increase and support the inflammatory action in the wound.

It might, therefore, be eligible, if called before the disease had become fully developed, to endeavour, by a generous use of wine, brandy or opium, to crush it, whilst yet in its infancy. But much of this must be left to, the skill and judgement of, the practitioner. The practice, employed by Doct. Hartshorne, of this city, by the use of caustic to the back part of the neck, would be very applicable here, if the symptoms continued increasing. And I presume,

great advantage might even arise from the application of a blister along the whole course of the spinal column. But, in all cases, the wound should be opened to the bottom and dressed with the most stimulating articles.

It is unnecessary to enlarge, further, upon the many medicines which have been proposed, and employed in this disease.

But in whatever stage we attack it, or whatever remedies we use, let them be carried to the greatest extent; lest, whilst we are trifling with ordinary quantities, our patient sinks into eternity.

Having, now, brought to a conclusion my Inaugural Thesis, and, as it contains some opinions, which have originated with myself, I submit it, with due deference, to those who are to decide upon its merits.

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